

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One En Route to Great Falls, Montana

July 5, 2018

The President. Hello, everybody. Friendly group. How are you?

We got—Scott Pruitt did an outstanding job inside of the EPA. We've gotten rid of record regulations. And really, it's been very good. Obviously, you know the controversies with Scott. But within the agency, we were extremely happy.

His Deputy has been with me, actually, a long time. He was very much an early Trump supporter. He was with us on the campaign. He is a very environmental person who is a great believer, and he's going to do a fantastic job—Andrew.

Resignation of Environmental Protection Agency Administrator E. Scott Pruitt

Q. What do you think—what was the final straw for you with the controversies, Mr. President?

The President. No final straw. I think Scott saw that he was—you know, he was—Scott—look, Scott is a terrific guy. And he came to me, and he said: "Look, I have such great confidence in the administration. I don't want to be a distraction." And I think Scott felt that he was a distraction.

Q. So it was his decision and not yours, Mr. President?

The President. It was very much up to him.

Q. When did he approach you just to resign? Was it at the fireworks, or was it this morning?

The President. A day—a couple of days. We had been talking about it for a little while. I mean, we've been really talking about it. But he didn't want to be a distraction; he felt he was a distraction.

Q. Was there anything about the accusations against him that troubled you? I know you're concerned about fiscal responsibility.

The President. You know, that was one of those things. But he'll go on to great things, and he will—he's going to have a wonderful life, I hope. But he felt that he did not want to be a distraction to an administration that he has a lot of faith in. And you know, it's been very good.

[*At this point, the President made additional remarks off the record, and no transcript was provided. A reporter then asked a question as follows.*]

North Korea

Q. On North Korea, Secretary of State—

The President. Yes, it's going very well. There's been no missile launches, no nuclear tests. When I took office, North Korea—in fact, you can quote me on this—when I took office and under the Obama administration, North Korea was doing tremendous testing, tremendous missile launches, and you can ask President Obama, he was very close to going with to war. And you would have lost 50 million people plus.

When I was in, the rhetoric was very strong. In the meantime, for 8 months, you've had not one rocket launch, missile launch, and you haven't had one nuclear test.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Mr. President, anything you would say on the record about the Supreme Court? You said you've narrowed—you say on the record you've narrowed to three?

The President. I'll say on the record that I am interviewing some extraordinarily talented and brilliant people, and I'm very, very happy with them. And we will pick somebody who will be outstanding, hopefully, for many years to come.

Q. Then, can you say if you've narrowed the field at this point?

The President. I think I have it down to four people. And I think, of the four people, I have it down to three or two.

Q. Will you make a decision by——

The President. And I think they're all outstanding. Honestly, I could pick any one of the 25, and they would be terrific. Those are very terrific people to—that whole list is very extraordinary.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. So the four would be Kethledge, Kavanaugh, Barrett, and Hardiman?

The President. I don't want to say the four, but I have it down to four.

Q. When do you hope to decide? You'll hope to decide by Sunday?

The President. I think I'll have a decision by Sunday. Yes, I'll have a decision made in my mind by Sunday. We'll announce it on Monday. I'll give you the answer.

Q. Are you planning on bringing any of them to Bedminster this weekend for one——

The President. I was thinking about it. I doubt it. Unlikely. Unlikely.

Q. But you still——

The President. I do have—Mike Pence is going to come up, and I have some people from the White House coming up to Bedminster. We're going to go over Supreme Court and some other things that we're working on.

Q. Are you going to make some more phone calls with potential nominees?

Trade

Q. Since we're also on the record, on tariffs you'll—can you say on the record that the tariffs will go into effect at 12:01?

The President. Whatever the time is, yes, they go into——

Q. [Inaudible]

The President. And I think it's \$36 million, and then you have another——

Q. Thirty-four [billion][°] dollars.

[°] Bracketed text here and in the next paragraph indicates a White House correction.

The President. —\$34 [billion], and then you have another \$16 [billion] in 2 weeks. And then, as you know, we have \$200 billion in abeyance. And then, after the \$200 billion, we have \$300 billion in abeyance. Okay? So we have \$50 [billion], plus \$200 [billion], plus almost \$300 [billion]. Okay?

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Are you talking about China or are you talking about all—

The President. That's only on China.

[*The President made additional remarks off the record, and no transcript was provided.*]

White House staffer. Thanks, guys.

The President. Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:19 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Environmental Protection Agency Deputy Administrator Andrew R. Wheeler. A reporter referred to Raymond M. Kethledge, judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit; Brett M. Kavanaugh, judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit; Amy Coney Barrett, judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit; and Thomas M. Hardiman, judge, U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: Air Force One.

Locations: Air Force One.

Names: Obama, Barack; Pence, Michael R.; Pruitt, E. Scott; Wheeler, Andrew R.

Subjects: China : U.S. tariff structure, strengthening efforts; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Environmental Protection Agency; Government organization and employees : Federal regulations, review; Judiciary : Federal court nominations and confirmations; North Korea : Ballistic missiles, testing and development; North Korea : Nuclear weapons development; White House Office : Vice President.

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